

16.—DO SNAKES DRINK MILK?

While reading *Marvels of Reptile Life* by W. S. Berridge, F.Z.S., I have come across the following interesting passage:—

'All snakes drink very freely, and many of them are very fond of milk. In India, the natives will place saucers full of milk near the hiding places of cobras, or in the temples where they are worshipped, in order to propitiate the reptiles; while the Racer or Whip Snake, to quote the words of Lawson "haunts the Dairies of careless Housewives, and never misses to skim the Milk clear of Cream".'

I have experimented with two cobras and a saw-scaled viper and I can assure you that none of these snakes showed the slightest inclination to take this inviting drink. I have spent some years in places where dangerous snakes, including cobras, are quite common, but I know no instance of any snake having even touched a saucer of milk either offered to it or left by a careless housewife. A learned friend of mine has positively declared that the belief that snakes drink milk is quite erroneous and that milk forms no part of their diet. I may add here that this friend of mine has kept many live snakes.

You know well that Indian snake-charmers play upon the belief of laymen that snakes have a strong liking for milk and these garudiwalas induce the public to pay something to feed their reptile pets on milk. I have more than once offered an attractive tip to snake-charmers if they would feed their snakes on milk before my eyes and I assure you that every time either they have failed or refused to demonstrate on some pretext or another.

May I request you to let me know your views on this interesting subject?

80 A, KURLA ROAD,
ANDHERI.
20th February 1946.

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[A thirsty snake will readily drink any liquid, be it water or milk, to quench its thirst, but will show no preference for milk. Milk is not a reptilian food.—EDS.]

17.—AESTIVATION OF THE FROG *RAMANELLA*
MONTANA (JERDON).

At Khandala, Western Ghat, on the 20th January 1945 while turning out the debris in a hollow of a tree, I turned out what, at first sight, appeared to be two coleopterous larvae which had been ruptured in the process, but on closer examination they proved to be a pair of frogs, *Ramanella montana*. The hollow was about two feet above the ground and its contents were slightly damp. The behaviour of the frogs at the time of disturbance was certainly curious. The short legs were stiffly, and well tucked into the body and handling did not induce the animals to move them; the body skin was thrown into numerous folds; a strong fold of skin across

the head forming a high ridge close behind the eyes from under which the strikingly small, beady eyes peered out. In this condition the animals looked in all the world as though they were a pair of ruptured larvae of the Rhinoceros beetle (*Oryctes* sp.). In general colouring they were a pale olive grey above and heavily mottled with deep brown and grey below; a brownish, black bordered band crossed the thigh, the middle of the leg, and a third a little way below the 'heel'. When the legs are drawn up the three bands appear confluent; similar bands crossed the forearm and the 'wrist'; a black, broken W-shaped marking was visible at the base of the skull, anterior to this are two black spots and another nearer the snout. The markings appear to be permanent and are still visible in preservation.

On dissection the two proved to be male and female. Except for size, and some paler patches behind the head and about the loins in the male, there did not appear any marked external differences between the sexes. The female measured 45 mm. from snout to vent, and the male 33 mm. An examination of the gonads indicated that the ovaries were slightly enlarged and the ova distinctly granular. The fat bodies were much enlarged and filled the greater part of the abdominal cavity. The testes of the male were still small, and like the female, the fat bodies were enlarged and occupied a considerable portion of the body cavity.

Be it coincidence or otherwise, this was the first time I found a pair, male and female, of this frog aestivating together. It is well-known that some other species of frogs collect and aestivate together in the same cavity.

BOMBAY NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY,
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C. McCANN.

18.—THE DISTRIBUTION OF *RANA LEITHII* BOULENGER.

Judging from the fact that *R. leithii* was represented by a single specimen, the type, in the British Museum, Natural History, up to the time it was 'rediscovered' by me at Khandala (vide *Journ., B.N.H.S.*, xxxvi, p. 167) it would appear to be a rare species, but since then I have been able to record it from various other localities in the Bombay Presidency, viz. Gersoppa Falls, N. Kanara; Kanari Caves, Salsette Island; Lingmala Falls, near Mahableshwar; and recently I collected it at Matheran, the type locality.

In most of the above-mentioned localities the frogs were frequent, but at Matheran they were definitely *very common* at dusk after the thunder showers on the 10th and 11th June (1945). There were actually hundreds hopping about the roads, among the rocks of the boundary walls and among the fallen leaves. When I mentioned to my companion Mr. Manek Captain that the frogs appeared to me to be the 'rare' *R. leithii* he rightly had the laugh of me,